New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1956

Volume XVII, Number 6 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of February 27, 1956

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"Debut"

New York World-Telegram
and
The [illegible] Sun

February 23, 1956

Inger Stevens Runs Away With 'Debut'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It is a long time since anything so openly concerned with moonbeams, juleps and drawls as "Debut" has hit Broadway.

And not many such plays have ever been graced with anything so delicious to the eye, so downright perky, as Inger Stevens. This dark-eyed, dimpled blonde hardly needs a fraction of the spirit she shows at the Holiday, to keep attention riveted her way.

But "Debut" is just kidding and should never be asked to undergo a Broadway premiere. Its deep South vagaries, its newly twisted old plot lines, even its sexy jokes, regaled chilly and jaded ears last night.

Classical Plot.

A delectable little rebel has been affianced since birth to a neighboring rich boy. Papa needs his credit. But Daughter falls for a visiting newspaperman. She lures him to the family hearthside so she may acquire the experience her fiance lacks.

Who falls in love with whom, who fights with whom, and who finally marries whom, is revealed with light-hearted and light-weight accuracy.

The play enjoys some first-rate performances by Tom Helmore as the charming, baffled journalist, G. Albert Smith as the heroine's father, and Charles McDaniel as the ousted groom.

Misplaced Drawl.

But "Debut" suffers from strange direction. The native Southerners talk so fast that when Helmore, as a New Yorker, comes on the scene, he seems to drawl.

The accents from below the Mason and Dixon are for the most part so artificial they sound as Yankee as Vermont maple syrup.

This poses a special problem for Eulabelle Moore, adroit and otherwise neat with her quips, as the plantation family's chief Negro retainer. After listening to some of her affected white folks, you might well assume she had gone to Vassar.

Oddly enough, or maybe not so oddly, "Debut" takes on its strongest reality when it is most sentimental. When Smith recalls the dances he watched as a child, or Helmore is drawn from the straight and narrow by moonlit music, there is a spell.

Miss Stevens has her own spells too, not the least of which is her fresh delivery of racy lines. There is a nice little growl by which she adds to laughs, too, and which she cagily saves up till late in the play.

"DEBUT"

Comedy by Mary Drayton, based on the novel "Maria and the Captain" by Isabel Dunn; staged by John Gerstad; scenery by John Boyt; presented by Richard Horner and Justin Sturm at the Holiday Theatre, February 22, 1956. The cast:

Mattie.....Alberta Hunter
Anna.....Eulabelle Moore
Maria Beraud.....Inger Stevens
Marjorie Hansford..Grace Raynor
Capt. Richard Beraud.....
G. Albert Smith
Aunt Phoebe.....Edith Gresham
Lid.....Osceola Archer
Dabney B. Featherstone III....
Charles McDaniels
Wyn Spaulding....Tom Helmore

Daily Mirror

February 23, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Debut' Just Another Play About the South

• Story of a girl who would rather be a tomboy than a belle.

The "Debut" at the Holiday Theatre Wednesday evening was not exactly an auspicious one. It marked the Broadway presentation of a new comedy by Mary Drayton to playgoing society. Though the occasion was intended to be a happy one, some of us by the end of the second act were wishing that we'd just skipped this coming-out party.

Miss Drayton based the script on Isabel Dunn's novel, "Maria and the Captain." It revolves around a Southern girl who would rather be a tomboy than a belle. But when a spohisticated writer from Boston comes to South Carolina to do a documentary series on aristocrats who never drink a mint julep without toasting Robert E. Lee, she starts swapping blue jeans for dresses. Heck, she even begins wearing shoes.

BEFORE ATTENDING her debut at an aunt's beautiful plantation, the minx cements on a beard to appear in a pageant. When some of it won't come off, the resourceful Yankee reporter solves the problem with an old-fashioned razor.

When it looks as though Maria Beraud were going to marry the stodgy Dabney Beauchamp Featherstone III, who is in line to take over his father's bank after a stint in the Navy, Winthrop Spaulding IV puts a stop to it by demanding that she make an honest man of him. Clinch. Curtain. Exit. The latter a real fast one.

Richard Horner got a leave of absence from his duties with "Damn Yankees," a Northern hit, to team with Justin Sturm to commit this Southern error. But it should be reported that they've done right well by it. John Gerstad has staged it for all it's worth, while John Boyt has contributed an accurate replica of a venerable Confederate morning room.

They've also engaged the ingratiating Tom Helmore to act the susceptible Wyn Spaulding, with his usual charm. But even the accomplished Helmore wasn't able to convince us that the fellow was overly bright. Inger Stevens, an attractive TV star, struggled valiantly with the rather empty-headed Maria Beraud.

* * *

G. ALBERT SMITH, Edith Gresham, Eulabelle Moore, Grace Raynor, Charles McDaniel, Osceloa Archer and Alberta Hunter, excellent troupers all, were others trapped in this too coy charade.

When directors have to cover thin spots on skimpy scripts this season, they invariably introduce an apple-chewing binge to pad out harrassed histrionics. In this instance, enough of Eve's fatal fruit is consumed to delight every loyal citizen of the state of Washington.

And no play about Dixie appears to be considered authentic unless the heroine goes barefoot most of the time. The shoe industry must be wriggling in its brogans over these slights to its product. But enough of this. The Holiday Theatre was less than festive on Washington's Birthday. The great George deserved a more fitting celebration.

The New York Times
February 23, 1956

Theatre: Mint Juleps and Jasmine

'Debut' Staged With Southern Stock

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ONE more play like "Debut" and the North will secede.

According to the program at the Holiday, where "Debut" opened last evening, Mary Drayton has put her comedy together from Isabel Dunn's novel, "Maria and the Captain." Whatever the specific source may be, it seems to be stitched together from the remnants of some little old Southern cotton mill.

Happy Negro servants sing plantation songs as preludes to the acts. Jasmin checks in early in the evening. Orders to have the horses saddled follow immediately. Mint juleps, Robert E. Lee, the traditions of old families and other staples turn up in their proper places; and nearly everyone is referred to as "honey."

•

"Debut" is stock company romance. There is a wild streak in honey-child Maria Beraud because her mother was a Californian. Probably from Hollywood, if the truth were known. Little Maria is supposed to marry Dabney Beauchamp Featherstone 3d, her next plantation neighbor. But she finds herself strangely attracted to a Yankee newspaper man who is doing some articles about the South and is cynically passing through. Disillusioned after a career as a foreign correspondent, he finds Maria innocent and refreshing.

Do you really want to know newspaper man invents to keep Maria from marrying Dabney Beauchamp Featherstone 3d? Yes or no? The nays have it.

To preserve the artistic unities, John Gerstad has staged a stock-company performance in which everyone crosses and recrosses the stage and the actors talk fast at the top of their voices, hoping perhaps that no one will listen to what they are saying. Tom Helmore, the jaded ex-foreign correspondent, is dapper, genial and relaxed as usual. As Capt. Richard Beraud, scion of an old and honorable Southern family, G. Albert Smith is the most consoling actor in the company. His Southern accent lasts for the entire three acts and amid all the author's mumbo-jumbo, he keeps his head like a gentleman.

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Inger Stevens, who plays honey-child Maria, is a problem. She is a golden blonde with black eyes, dimples, and a slender figure. She gives a high-strung, aggressive performance in which every move is a picture. If Miss Stevens seriously wants to become a stage actress, it is possible that she will have to forget her beauty, unlearn her mannerisms and start at the beginning again. There are no stock companies left to contain her kind of shallow, frantic performing.

The other actors behave as agreeably as they can in the circumstances. Things are tough all over.

what goes on in this Valentine from the South? Do you really want to know about Maria's coming-out party, the seduction in the gazebo, the bitter realities of the morning after and the cute device the Yankee

Mary Drayton Comedy Opens at Holiday

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
February 23, 1956

THEATER

'Debut'

By WALTER F. KERR

"DEBUT" is a play in which a young southern belle is unable to go to her coming-out party because she cannot get the whiskers off her face. Perhaps I'd better explain that she has been playing Judas Iscariot in a local pageant. Perhaps we'd have been better off seeing the pageant.

• • •

But let's keep our minds on what we did see at the Holiday Wednesday night. We saw a mellow old plantation daddy lean against a veranda pillar in the moonlight while a servant skittered down a staircase singing a mellow old tune. We saw daddy's daughter bounce all over the overstuffed furniture while she planned (a) escape from her stuffy fiance, (b) the seduction of a New York writer-fellow down to do a few "pieces for a news service," (c) the destruction of the English language by the drawling of every vowel to the shrieking point and the insertion of the letter 'y' into each unoffending word (a famous remark of Kipling's is paraphrased as "a hayunt of hayur," until you hayut everybody in sight).

• • •

We saw, if we kept on looking, the old marse borrow twenty bucks from a family retainer so that he could pay it back to another family retainer who would then loan it to the first family retainer. (Isn't "Charley's Aunt" still in copyright?) And just in case Bobby Clark wasn't listening, I want him to know that we heard one joker tell about how in his family there were "two boys and two girls" and another joker come right back with "That's very fair."

Well, sir, that isn't all we heard. Have a snatch of early-morning, pre-julep conversation around the Beraud living room:

"Where's Maria?"

"She's not down yet."

"She's not up?"

"If she was up she'd be down."

And consider, sir, that by not being at the Holiday Theater last night you missed any number of uses of the word 'virgin' in no particular comic context, a presumably hilarious slip-of-the-tongue in which a lass who meant to say that her mother was a true southerner because she was "conceived in Charleston" announces instead that she was "convinced in Charleston," and a rip-roaring scene-curtain in which Tom Helmore whips out an apron and a razor and manages to shave those whiskers right off Inger Stevens.

• • •

Now that the actors have been mentioned, there's nothing for it but to talk about them. Let it be said that Mr. Helmore, apart from a jaundiced makeup that may have had some emotional base, did all of the necessary shouting, wincing, and diving for a drink with a cheerful and chipper dexterity that was downright astonishing.

And Miss Stevens is a luscious girl with piercing blue eyes, very white teeth, all the animation a man could ask for, and a good, loud voice that is going to be a great help to her in some play that doesn't insist she use it so often.

As things stand, director John Gerstad has kept the entire company barking at one another's heels with such fierce persistence that there is never room for a laugh to slip in sidewise. Since Mary Drayton's comedy contains practically no laughs, this is obviously an intelligent move. But it is very wearing.

I thought G. Albert Smith, as the unreconstructed pappy who hates juleps but loves his fields of cotton, did unbelievably well by some of the play's soberer passages, and that Alberta Hunter, Eulabelle Moore, and Osceola Archer were pleasant as, respectively, the singing servant, the money-lending servant, and the servant who talks back to those yammerers around her.

In one little episode, and in the characteristic language of the play, Mr. Smith let us know that something or other was the most "shiver-makin' thing" that ever happened to him. "Debut" is pretty shiver-makin' itself.

DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER
February 23, 1956

'Debut' Makes a Doubtful Debut

By JOHN CHAPMAN

It is unfortunate that "Debut" has opened so soon after "The Ponder Heart," for comparisons arise in the mind. It may indeed be unfortunate that "Debut" has opened at all—which it did last evening at the Holiday Theatre—because the comedy lacks humor and is almost desperately unoriginal.

"The Ponder Heart" is a comedy about southern people and so is "Debut," but here the similarity ends. "Heart" is imaginative and human, but the newer play—adapted by Mary Drayton from a novel by Isabel Dunn called "Maria and the Captain"—is a standard sex comedy which might just as well have been set in northern New Jersey . . . and if the Jersey locale had been chosen the actors wouldn't be so nervous about their accents.

Strip Act

Here is what happens in "Debut": Curtain rises on blonde girl, back to audience, being fitted with petticoat for white ball gown. Above petticoat she is wearing a bra, which is the only location a bra can be worn. Colored servant finishes the fitting, strips girl of petticoat. Audience expects goodness knows what, but girl is wearing dungarees.

Girl is to make her debut and have her engagement to a young southern dope announced. In comes dashing reporter and novelist from the northeast—Boston. Girl and reporter have frolic in the gazebo, or summer house, even though reporter talks like both Alsop brothers. In end, girl spurns three-named boy, society, generations of tradition and my sensitivities as a playgoer, and decides she loves damyankee. I would not love him, for he does not act like a newspaperman or even an Alsop.

The cast includes Tom Helmore as the newsman and a newcomer, Inger Stevens, as the blonde. The players who help out number among themselves G. Albert Smith, Edith Gresham, Charles McDaniel, Eulabelle Moore and Grace Raynor. John Gerstad has directed the comedy as though his life depended on it, but I hope it doesn't.

Journal American
February 23, 1956

The South Again, Suh!

All the Old Stock Characters Are Assembled—to No Purpose

By JOHN McCLAIN

WE'VE HAD all kinds of Southern folks around the theatre lately: the rich and dissolute, poor and oppressed; some are quite compelling, others are charming and funny.

But last night in a play called "Debut" which opened at the Holiday Theatre we met a whole new platoon from "the deep South" and they were just plain silly.

It seems that the author, Mary Drayton, had gone to extremes to assemble all the stock characters that plague any play laid south of Cincinnati.

There was the servant singing spirituals in the background, the jolly Aunt Jemima who kids the young missy and lends money to "The Captain," the fading debutante rolling her eyes at each available male, the elderly great-aunt who holds the faltering family together. Yes, there was even the dashing Northerner who wins the day with "Yankee ingenuity."

It might still be conceivable to put these types together and come away with something short of farce, but the playwright didn't succeed in this instance. She endeavored to fashion a straight comedy out of the manners and traditions of an old plantation family played against the eager onslaught of a New York newspaperman.

There is, of course, the beautiful and unpredictable daughter and the handsome young friend of the family to whom she is pledged. You can take it from there.

Wears Beard

One moment remains in memory as a monument to something — probably burlesque. It seems this stunning belle of the old South is about to be presented to society at a large ball in "the big house." But on the afternoon of the event she has taken part in some amateur theatricals requiring her to wear a beard. Now, with her family waiting for her downstairs, she comes down the steps in her glamorous coming-out gown —and with her face covered in the remnants of the beaver! It is explained that the maid had applied it with tire cement.

When her beau and her relatives have left her in tears our hero from Up North appears with his shaving mug, and the evening is saved!

The evening presents an impregnable obstruction to most of the cast. Tom Helmore, an old hand with all kinds of material, is suitably dashing and persuasive in the rubber-stamp role of the Yankee. Inger Stevens, an extremely lissome and decorative little lass, making her debut on Broadway, is required to be so constantly drenched in treacle (and whiskers) that it is difficult to say what she'd do with a realistic part.

Do Their Best

G. Albert Smith has some moments of near-belief as "The Captain," the proud planter, and Charles McDaniel is actually quite engaging and plausible as the boy next door.

Eulabelle Moore, Edith Gresham, Osceola Archer and Alberta Hunter make the best of their supporting assignments and Grace Raynor, as the desperately love-lorn cousin, nearly gushes the mint out of the juleps before the evening is out.

As one member of the cast remarks to the young girl who has just had her debut: "You shouldn't ought to have 'come out,' honey. You ought to have stayed in." Unfortunately, this applies to the play in general.

New York Post

February 23, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

Placid Comedy of the Deep South

"Debut," which opened last night at the Holiday Theater, is based in considerable part on the assumption that well-brought-up Southern boys and girls know little about sex practices, which may be the season's most questionable premise for a play. As a fairly natural result, Mary Drayton's comedy takes on a certain quality of fantasy, despite its intention to be reasonably realistic in its contemplation of manners among the julep-drinking and tobacco-growing set in the Deep South.

Although Miss Drayton's play tells of a nice little Dixie ingenue's discovery of these practices, when she meets and falls in love with a dashing Yankee journalist from the Associated Press, it is a singularly placid and uneventful romantic comedy that she has written, and its peaceful pace may be the most realistic thing about it. There are a few quietly humorous lines, and the heroine is quite a charming girl, but I fear there is little in the narrative to raise it above lethargy.

Hint of Satire

If the romance never succeeds in being what one could call stimulating, its occasional thrusts in the direction of friendly satire seem equally mild. There is some attempt to indicate a contrast between the futile efforts of its Southern characters to remain in a magnolia-strewn past and the up-and-coming vigor of the debonair Massachusetts reporter, but nothing much comes of it. I think it is likely that the play's insistence on being friendly and eschewing any sharpness of viewpoint has a great deal to do with its excessive dramatic languor.

There were occasions when I hoped that the heroine's nostalgia-ridden father—who, by the way, is a Captain rather than a Colonel as a point of novelty—was going to be of help to the evening, particularly as he was engagingly played by the veteran G. Albert Smith. When the courteous old gentleman, who lived contentedly amid his Confederate cliches, confessed to the Northerner over his mint julep that he hated the darned things and drank them out of a sense of obligation, there was a moment of brightness.

Inger Stevens

But, unfortunately, very little came of it all, and "Debut" slipped back into its lethargy. It seemed most unhappy, too, because the ingenue was being played with beguiling charm and humor by a bright-eyed and pretty young newcomer named Inger Stevens. There was a moment or two at the beginning of the comedy when I feared that Miss Stevens was going in for cuteness, but she soon eluded the peril and went on to achieve a personal success of gratifying proportions.

There are other agreeable performances in addition to those of Miss Stevens and Mr. Smith. An amiably fatuous Southern juvenile is believably portrayed by Charles McDaniel, while Grace Raynor is equally realistic as a coy Dixie belle, Eulabelle Moore is amusing as a Negro maid who entertains herself by reading Freud, and Tom Helmore again demonstrates his easy and pleasantly bantering style as the visiting reporter. But "Debut," for all its amiability, is more soporific than stimulating.

"Miss Julie" and "The Stronger"

DAILY NEWS

February 22, 1956

'Miss Julie' a Dramatic Curio, but Miss Lindfors Is a Fine Actress

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Sweden's great dramatist, August Strindberg, was a pioneer of the so-called modern, or realistic theatre, and his preoccupation with and candid discussion of sex was daring, once. But, last evening at the Phoenix Theatre, his "Miss Julie" was merely a dramatic curio. It did serve, however, to remind us first-nighters that Viveca Lindfors is an extraordinarily good actress and a lady of fascinating beauty.

"Miss Julie," as adapted by George Tabori, mixes classes and sexes in equal proportions, and what makes it a curio today is that we have only sexes left. The woman of the title is well-born, high-handed and love-hungry, and she has the misfortune to fall in love with and present herself to a valet on her father's estate. The lackey already has a comfortable arrangement with the cook, but an attachment with Miss Julie strikes him as a chance to escape from the servant class and become wealthy and important.

Implicit Tragedy

The valet reflects Strindberg's view. He sees himself running a hotel resort on Lake Como, where lovers take accommodations for the season but stay only three weeks. "There is plenty of love around," he declares, "but it never lasts long." This means added profits. Inevitably, his affair with Miss Julie doesn't last long, either, and the only solution is tragedy—Julie's suicide.

This short drama has been well staged by Tabori, charmingly set by Klaus Holm and interestingly costumed by Alvin Colt. Miss Lindfors is really splendid, and her performance is reason enough for dropping in on the Phoenix. There is a forthright performance by James Daly as the valet, and a good character job by Ruth Ford as the cook.

"Miss Julie" is preceded by a Strindberg dramatic sketch, "The Stronger," which is a monologue by Miss Ford. The setting is a Paris cafe, and here Miss Ford encounters Miss Lindfors. Miss Lindfors never says a word, but there is a battle between the two women nevertheless—over a man, of course. Ford wins.

And now I'd like to ask the operators of the theatre, T. Edward Hambleton and Norris Houghton, to do something about the deodorant they use in their place. It is overpowering and unpleasant, and last evening I decided to call the playhouse the Phewnix Theatre.

"MISS JULIE" and "THE STRONGER"

Two plays by August Strindberg; adapted by George Tabori; staged by Mr. Tabori; scenery and lighting by Klaus Holm; costumes by Alvin Colt; presented by T. Edward Hambleton and Norris Houghton at the Phoenix Theatre, February 21, 1956. The cast:

"Miss Julie"

Miss Julie.....Viveca Lindfors
Jean.....James Daly
Kristin.....Ruth Ford

"The Stronger"

Miss Y.....Viveca Lindfors
Mrs. X.....Ruth Ford
A Waiter.....Jamie Smith

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

February 22, 1956

Phoenix Revives Two Strindbergs

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The Phoenix Theater is offering a double bill of Strindberg plays, as its current, though not its happiest, attraction.

The first is a virtual monologue entitled "The Stronger." The latter is a longer work, played in two parts, and called "Miss Julie."

The longer play is set in the Eighties in Sweden, and is solemnly concerned with rigid class distinctions.

Its morbid, lugubrious association between a young lady and her father's valet, seems an archaic museum piece now when there is scarcely any such thing as a servant, much less a servant problem.

About 25 years ago it became popular and smart for rich girls in plays and novels to elope gaily with any handy, virile menials. But Miss Julie was ahead of her times.

Her rebellion against social distinctions brings into the open a mightily unsettled mind. She likes to horsewhip gentlemen f r i e n d s. When the valet shows a little spunk, she proceeds to seduce him.

Then she turns all willowy and helpless. At his urging, she robs her father's desk for the money to start a hotel at Lake Como. But when this plan displeases him, Miss Julie urges the cook to join them.

In the end the servant is hitting the road, the cook has gone primly to church, and Julie is hacking a wrist with a kitchen knife.

There may be a fascinating lot of period social significance in all this. But George Tabori's adaptation of the play, with its jarring alterations of language style, and his direction, with its abrupt switches of mood, do not clarify or enhance what Strindberg was saying.

Viveca Lindfors does her decorative best to make a consistent figure of Julie. James Daly as the valet makes the man a callous opportunist. Ruth Ford plays the whining cook, but has her bigger chance as the sole speaker in the curtain raiser.

The Klaus Holm scenery is economical and vivid, and the Alvin Colt costumes first-rate.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

February 22, 1956

THEATER

'Miss Julie'

By WALTER F. KERR

THE heroine of Strindberg's "Miss Julie" is an imperious lady who likes to suggest to her suitors that they kiss the tip of her shoe, and when they are really in need of training, that they leap over her horsewhip and then feel its blow. Like the passionate woman he created, Strindberg is a dramatist with a horsewhip.

* * *

In the play, which is being given a stinging revival at the Phoenix, the author has spared his bleeding people—and his audience — very little. The haughty mistress of a Swedish household in the 1880s is not alone in her capacity to inflict pain. The brusquely confident valet to whom she wantonly gives herself has come to his present authority through a good bit of mire: literally, he has found his way up into the world through an outhouse. When he has at last succeeded in possessing his mistress, he gives as good as he has got from the world: he spits in the lady's face, and contemptuously tosses her a prostitute's coin. Before the curtain has come down on these viciously mated emotional failures, the woman has turned her hand into a claw and pronounced a malediction on all men, a bird's neck has been wrung on the stage, and a razor has been put to despairing use.

If Strindberg has been little done on the American stage the reason must be clear enough. A nightmare universe teeters on the edge of insanity. All the more credit then to adapter-director George Tabori for the brilliance with which he has held this phantasmagoria in tense, brittle, compelling balance. Moreover, he has made each of its appalling steps utterly plausible.

As adapter, Mr. Tabori has given his actors language that is spare, blunt, drained of affection ("Don't step down," is the valet's grim warning to his mistress, "they'll get the wrong idea—they'll say you fell"); yet its directness and candor is never so prosaic that the curious midnight imagery of it's principals' dreams cannot be caught in a single flaring sentence.

As director, he has guided a sensitive company into relationships that are as tactile as they are terrifying. When Viveca Lindfors, who may have the loveliest profile on this continent, sidles into the servants' kitchen to torment the man she is after, you are not deceived by the cool, ivory mask she wears for a face. A demon moves her, dictating each lithe impulse of her body as she coils an irresistible net. And as the arrogant James Daly, a boor who knows he is a boor and takes his power from it, feverishly polishes a pair of boots in fierce determination that the lady shall make the first gesture, the tension between two savage poles becomes absolute.

Both Miss Lindfors and Mr. Daly are in their very best form, so disciplined in their emotional responses and so taut in their awareness of one another that they are able to seize upon any extravagance Strindberg can devise and play it at face value: at one moment they are on their knees together, in terror of being separated, at another he is dragging her across the floor as she clutches his legs in a frenzy. The playwright's passions are outsize; the players are able to fill them.

And in the relatively brief role of a servant whose own happiness is shattered by a destructive liaison, Ruth Ford carves out an earthy, finely shaded, finally very moving portrait. Klaus Holm's single setting—suspended borders and cupboards against a leafy skyline—is a stunning skeleton against which flesh and blood can take on even greater dimension, and Alvin Colt 's period costumes are perfect.

* * *

There are limitations to the power of "Miss Julie." Something of the shifting social status that gives its principals their vindictive anger with life has faded; the beginnings of the heroine's venom in her "advanced" mother's philosophy are a little lost on us now. Though Mr. Daly is an excellent actor, he cannot always get us past his man's violent shudders at a grimy past. And, as of a Monday night preview, the final scene of the play cried for cutting if its sustained sense of doom was not to come tumbling down. In addition, a short monologue called "The Stronger," used to fill out the bill, is nowhere so impressive as the chilling "Miss Julie."

But gratitude comes first. It isn't likely we'll get such gripping Strindberg soon again.

The New York Times

February 22, 1956

Theatre: Strindberg Bill

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH Strindberg's "Miss Julie" is 86 years old, it is remarkably modern in spirit and craftsmanship. And the intelligent performance that was put on at the Phoenix last evening quite rightly treats Strindberg as contemporary.

For he is the pioneer in the psychiatric approach to human behavior that we hastily regard as a recent development; and he is also the literary godfather of O'Neill. "Miss Julie" is a detached, bitter study of two human beings who develop in opposite directions.

By accepting the family valet as her lover on a festival night, Miss Julie loses social eminence and finds that she has no strength of her own. But the valet acquires strength. He finds that he has a power of decision of which he had not previously been aware. She is trapped by life. He is released from servitude.

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Since Strindberg was the son of a servant and painfully sensitive about his inferior position in the Swedish social scale, "Miss Julie" had personal significance. It is written out of resentment and hostility with sharpness of statement and economy of means—hatred for the upper classes, contempt for the peasants, scorn for religion, disgust for the hypocrisy of life.

The Phoenix has bestowed on it one of its better productions. Klaus Holm's airy, country setting is beautiful, and Alvin Colt's period costumes are attractive. In his direction, George Tabori has adhered to modern techniques.

In the part of Miss Julie, Viveca Lindfors is like a lovely nineteenth-century miniature—all grace and lucidity. James Daly plays the valet with impudent callousness. Their performances are intelligent because they trace the transition in their relationship in the course of the play. Ruth Ford acts the part of the cook with the coarseness and stability that Strindberg wrote into it.

Despite the obvious merits of the performance, something is missing. The raging spirit of Strindberg never catches hold of the performance and sets it on fire. He was not a cool, methodical writer. He was a rebellious writer, determined that everyone should share his anger and pain. There is a lot of good acting and craftsmanship in the performance, but little of the tempestuousness of Strindberg.

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Before "Miss Julie" takes the stage, the Phoenix offers Strindberg's "The Stronger" as curtain-raiser. "The Stronger" is a monologue with three characters—Miss Y, Mrs. X and one waiter. While Miss Y sits silent at a table in a cafe, Mrs. X directs a torrent of conversation at her, a few taunts developing into a tirade towards the end. Again, Strindberg pokes into the dark, secret background of their relationship, touching on wounding things whenever he can.

Strikingly costumed, Miss Ford carries off this withering tour de force with a good deal of vivacity, variety and bluntness. There is more of the Strindberg impetuous style of attack in "The Stronger" than there is in "Miss Julie." He was not a temperate writer.

New York Post

February 22, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

An Evening With August Strindberg

The dark and glowering bitterness of old August Strindberg, the melancholy Swede, is always an impressive and rather frightening spectacle to behold, and his hatred of mankind, or, to be more specific, womankind, provides an almost inescapable fascination. I think this is true even in the case of "Miss Julie," which has always seemed to me one of his least successful exercises in venom. There is no denying the baleful power of this short and angry play, but the rest of the truth about it, I think, is that it grows a little tiresome in its overwrought narrative.

Anyway, "Miss Julie" is currently on view at the ever-active Phoenix Theater, where it had its first performance last night in a vigorous and, as I recall it, not too free English adaptation by George Tabori, who is an interesting dramatist in his own right. Mr. Tabori has also adapted Strindberg's minor vaudeville monologue, "The Stronger," which is likewise on display at the Phoenix as a curtain-raiser to "Miss Julie," even though, so far as I am concerned, it adds little to the bill save length.

No Comedy

"Miss Julie," of course, is the main business of the evening, and Viveca Lindfors in the title part, James Daly and Ruth Ford, who play its three roles, come to grips with its glum humorlessness in forthright and convincing fashion. As a matter of fact, Mr. Tabori has even added an occasional hint of something almost approaching humor, but no one is likely to mistake the drama for a comedy. The all-pervading Strindberg pessimism is a very serious matter, and poor Julie goes to her inevitable doom in an inexorable fashion that may not be touching but is certainly harrowing.

Do you remember about Julie? A tortured and perhaps slightly oversexed girl, whose mother and father had hated each other in characteristic Strindberg style, she loathed mankind but unfortunately fell in love with her family's ambitious serving man with dire results that justified all her worst suspicions of the masculine gender. For one thing, he killed her pet canary, the only creature that had ever really loved her. He also called her names which were justified but unkind.

I'm afraid this sounds as if I didn't take "Miss Julie" seriously. But I do. The striking thing about the play is that, overwrought, humorless and maddened as it is, its detestation of the human race is deeply and terribly impressive. It captures a black and angry mood that cannot be evaded. The only trouble is that it too rarely succeeds in being as dramatically interesting as it is philosophically overpowering. I think it arouses one's attention without an equivalent stirring of the emotions.

As for "The Stronger," it permits Miss Ford to go into a long monologue as Miss Lindfors sits about and looks cryptic. Its point appears to be that the garrulous woman, who at first seems to be the vanquished one, turns out to be victorious over the rival who has originally appeared triumphant. But it strikes me as a fairly feeble little anecdote. "Miss Julie" is all that really matters, and, while its ugly mood is not easily forgettable, its drama is second-best Strindberg.